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"MURDER IS MURDER"

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EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IN May last, when the McNamaras had just been arrested, and when, I regret to say, many men who posed either as leaders in the Socialist party or as especial champions and representatives of the cause of labor were frantically denouncing the arrest and were endeavoring to cloud the issue of right and wrong by an appeal to class prejudice, I wrote in *The Outlook* an article entitled "Murder is Murder." In

that article I set forth what certainly seems the sufficiently obvious doctrine that heinous crime should be treated purely as crime, without regard to the political, social, or business affiliations of the criminal; a doctrine which, however obvious in theory, our country sorely needs to have put into active practice. Not only laboring men, but business men, capitalists, have at times shown the worst form of class consciousness—that of

sinister and brutal class selfishness in standing by criminals simply because they were of their own class. This has been done by capitalists in the case of capitalists who have been guilty of brazen corruption, and by laborers in the case of labor leaders who have been guilty of murderous violence. The two offenses stand on a par from the standpoint of damage to the community. In San Francisco in one municipal contest the capitalists who desired to be free from all check on corruption and the labor leaders who desired to be free from all check on lawless violence struck hands and elected their ticket; and this proved in the end to be a lasting misfortune to San Francisco, to the cause of honest business, and to the cause of honest labor.

Since the startling outcome of the McNamara trial certain apologists of these men have made themselves conspicuous by asserting that these depraved criminals, who have on their seared souls the murder of so many innocent persons—*all of them laboring people, by the way*—are “victims,” or at worst “fanatics,” who should receive sympathy because they were acting in what they regarded as a “war” on behalf of their class! The plea is monstrous in its folly and its wickedness. It is precisely the kind of plea sometimes advanced on behalf of a crooked man of great wealth caught bribing a legislature—that he has to do it to protect his business. We are not here dealing with any of the kinds of offenses incidental to the sudden and sweeping changes brought about by modern industrial conditions into which capitalists or labor men are sometimes drawn without any very great conscious moral turpitude on their part. We are dealing with crimes as old as the lawgiving from Sinai, with crimes—murder and theft—that have been prohibited ever since the decalogue was formulated. The murders committed by men like the McNamaras, although nominally in the interest of organized labor, differ not one whit in moral culpability from those committed by the Black Hand, or by any band of mere cutthroats, and are fraught with an infinitely heavier menace to society. Yet, great though the menace is to the community, the menace to the cause of honest organized labor is still greater, and no duty is more imperatively laid on the leaders of labor than the duty of affirmatively freeing themselves and their followers from the taint of responsibility for such criminals and such crimes. The labor leaders who

by their loud championship of the McNamaras—as previously of Moyer and Haywood—have succeeded in identifying them with the cause of labor in the eyes of the public have rendered an evil service to that cause. Mr. Debs and the extremists of his type among the so-called political Socialists—I say so-called because Debs and his followers of the Emma Goldman kind are not Socialists at all in any true sense of the word, but mere inciters to murder and preachers of applied anarchy—and the labor leaders affiliated with them, have always boasted of the part they played in the trial of Moyer and Haywood; and in this case they repeated their familiar tactics, and held mass-meetings, and scattered broadcast papers and addresses in which they furiously denounced the effort to bring wrong-doers to justice, and sought to arouse every evil class instinct against all who upheld the cause of law or sought to put a stop to assassination and murderous violence. It is worth noting that since McNamara confessed his guilt Mr. Moyer, the head of what purports to be a labor organization, is reported in the press as commenting upon it, not by denouncing McNamara for having committed the murder, but by denouncing him for having confessed it! Such denunciation is significant.

Murder is murder, and the foolish sentimentalists or sinister wrong-doers who try to apologize for it as an “incident of labor warfare” are not only morally culpable but are enemies of the American people, and, above all, are enemies of American wage-workers. In honorable contrast to these men stand the various labor leaders who have never asked for more than a fair trial for the McNamaras, whose purpose has only been to get justice, and who now sternly demand that murder shall be punished when committed in the nominal interest of labor precisely as under any other circumstances. I believe with all my heart in the American workingman; I believe with all my heart in organized labor, for labor must be organized in order to protect and secure its rights; and therefore with all my strength I urge my fellow-citizens, the American men and women who earn their livelihood as wage-workers, to see that their leaders stand for honesty and obedience to the law, and to set their faces like flint against any effort to identify the cause of organized labor, directly or indirectly, with any movement which in any shape or way benefits by the commission of crimes of lawless and murderous violence.